

Summary of the Draft Final Report of the project on Transnational Support mechanism for European Co-operation (TranSMEC)

This targeted analysis project shows how ESPON results could be used in the INTERREG programme. It focuses only on North West Europe (NWE), but in principle its findings could apply to all INTERREG regions. Furthermore, some of its recommendations to ESPON point to ways to make ESPON's data more useful to practitioners in general.

In essence the project has looked at how far the INTERREG Transnational Co-operation programme and the projects within that programme could be better informed by and monitored through ESPON. This could be a significant step forward in the dissemination and capitalisation of ESPON results.

Overlays and case studies

The analysis mainly involves overlaying geographical patterns of INTERREG activity (funding of projects, number of projects, number of partners) on ESPON maps for the North West Europe region. There are also two case studies. One looks in more detail at matching the findings of the on-going ESPON project on Knowledge, Innovation and Territory (KIT) with the INTERREG priority 1, "Developing the NWE knowledge-based economy by capitalising on our capacity for innovation". The other case study is still to be completed but looks in some detail at a region, the Dutch province of Zeeland.

The substantive results are less interesting than the points they raise and the questions they pose. Thus the analysis demonstrates that it is possible, for example, to see where INTERREG money goes (or projects are most numerous) in relation to existing performance/need on topics like innovation. While this is not always possible (as some INTERREG priorities are expressed in a slightly nebulous way) it does pose challenges to the INTERREG programme. Should they back regions that already demonstrate excellence – or favour those catching up? Or is some mix of the two the best way to spread good practice?

Using ESPON

ESPON could be used in the process of partner search, to identify similar regions. This holds true not just for INTERREG in NWE, but for other EU programmes too. ESPON can also be used in the development and monitoring of macro-regional strategies (in this case the Spatial Vision for NWE, for example). More generally, private and public actors which are engaged in activities with a high territorial impact might use ESPON results in designing, planning and refining their activities. However, to achieve these ambitions requires some changes in the way that both ESPON and INTERREG currently operate.

Recommendations to ESPON

The report makes a number of recommendations to ESPON. The main ones are:

- ESPON documents like the “Synthesis report”, “Territorial observations” or “Scientific report” could be used as the basis for a meeting to connect researchers and the INTERREG programme developers.
- It would be useful if ESPON could identify concisely all relevant ESPON information that would assist the development of the INTERREG programme under the different thematic aspects of the ERDF.
- The ESPON database is a research oriented database, a scientific tool designed mainly for use by researchers. However, “it might be useful to have an easier and more general accessibility tool (sic) that provides the maps for different topics. It would not be necessary to access the underlying data sets, but rather receive and overview of the situation in the programme area under a certain topic.”
- ESPON information could be used to create an “INTERREG Hotline”, giving easy access to ESPON maps, information about partner regions, a general introduction to a topic etc. “A facilitated access to ESPON project information - by ‘non-researchers’ could help to make the use easier. The TransMEC group has tried to enter typical key words of the existing projects into the ESPON search function, but the results were rather diffuse. Consequently, a specific assistance would be needed. It might be constructive to initiate a pilot phase in which an ‘INTERREG Hotline’ could be presented on the ESPON website which would be interlinked to the NWE website.”

Lead partner: blue! Advancing European Projects, Germany

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Future reports: Final Report 2 June 2011

Relevant ESPON projects: KIT

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